

September 8, 2008

OPEN LETTER TO PREMIER AND ALL MPPS
Re: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy

Dear Premier McGuinty:

As we approach the beginning of the Legislature's fall session, a historic achievement on poverty reduction is within Ontario's reach. Building on the past 12 months of consultation and deliberation, we are writing to urge you and your colleagues to put poverty reduction at the top of your agenda this fall and to deliver on a multi-year plan to cut poverty by 25% in 5 years, and at least 50% in 10 years, backed by significant investments.

With a federal election looming, we also urge you to call on the next federal government to play its part by becoming a significant funding partner in provincial poverty reduction strategies.

Last September over 100 organizations and individuals came together in a common call to all parties in the Ontario election to commit to reduce Ontario's poverty rate by 25% within 5 years. Since then we have made progress. Last October, Premier McGuinty, you committed to make poverty reduction a political priority in your renewed mandate from the Ontario electorate. You established a new Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction and appointed Minister Deb Matthews responsible for leading development of Ontario's Poverty Strategy. Last spring community consultations began.

The economic challenges that have recently beset our province have served to underscore the importance of tackling poverty. Not only should we be moved to action by the moral imperative that in our communities no one gets left behind, but we must also confront the economic imperative that we need all hands on deck if we are going to build a sustainable path to provincial prosperity into the future.

This past summer Minister Deb Matthews led a caucus-wide initiative to engage Ontarians about ideas for a Poverty Reduction Strategy. Between May and August, more than 50 community meetings took place across Ontario, from Thunder Bay to Windsor, Kincardine to Scarborough. As several thousand Ontarians came out to voice their opinion on how to reduce poverty in our province, the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction was there to take notes.

Attached is a report based on common messages that were heard in provincial poverty reduction consultations across the province. They include:

- **Take the long view:** a successful strategy should be anchored in long term solutions with significant financial resources, not just quick fixes.
- **Help everyone become their best:** Ontario's strategy should focus on preventing and ending poverty for all people, not just children. Those who live in poverty should continue to be consulted as the strategy is implemented and progress tracked.
- **Make work pay:** a Good Jobs Strategy must be an integral component of the plan – raise minimum wages, improve access to unionization, expand health benefits, update and enforce labour laws so that temporary and contract workers are protected.
- **Ensure dignity for all:** the Ontario Child Benefit should be increased and social assistance fundamentally reformed to ensure a livable income for all.
- **Help build strong and supportive communities** with affordable housing, early learning and child care, public education and community programs that help people connect.
- **Count everyone in:** the plan should include targeted measures to address the higher than average levels of poverty faced by Aboriginal People, racialized communities, newcomers, single mothers, and people with disabilities. Anti racism policies should be developed including employment equity.

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We sincerely hope that these same messages are reflected in the Ontario government's poverty reduction strategy scheduled to be released this coming December.

One year ago, your bold leadership gave hope to so many thousands of Ontarians living on low incomes. Tremendous gains have been made in the last year to help Ontarians recognize that all of us have a stake in reducing poverty levels and creating a more inclusive and equitable society. We urge you now to seize this historic moment by implementing a strategy that will allow us to join with your government in celebrating 25% reduction in poverty five years down the road.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction:



Peter Clutterbuck, **Social Planning Network of Ontario**
Mike Creek, **Voices from the Street**
Jacquie Maund, **Ontario Campaign 2000**

www.25in5.ca

c/o 355 Church St, Toronto M5B 1Z8